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The Cuban Base Problem in Perspective

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1. The Soviet decision to establish nuclear strike bases in Cuba must be considered one of the boldest taken by the Soviet leadership since Korea. And like the Korean decision it was an "out of character" decision in the sense that it broke the pattern of immediately past conduct, among other things inviting a US reaction of a type that Moscow previously had attempted to avoid. This suggests that the Soviet decision was born either of a calculation that they could get away with establishing bases in Cuba without substantial risk, or compelling motivation, or both.

a. That the Soviets downplayed the likelihood of a dangerous US reaction would seem a very good possibility. Cuba fell into the Soviet lap without particular efforts or costs on Moscow's part. Events moved in a way, however, which came heavily to engage both Soviet resources and prestige. At the same time, the Castro regime showed itself pliable to the Soviet will and the US demonstrated a clear unwillingness to get itself directly involved in a move to get rid of the regime. The USSR and the Satellites were able to move into Cuba in a way and to an extent that might well have suggested almost no limit to possibilities. Thus the Bloc largely took over the economy, the administrative structure, and the military establishment. With the Cubans having welcomed, and the US having tolerated, Soviet military advisers and probably some operational

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operational personnel, Soviet tanks, and up-to-date Soviet combat aircraft, Moscow may have reasoned that it could take the next logical step and safely make Cuba into an offensive base that would give it a concrete and telling military presence at a strategic point in the western hemisphere. As an adjunct to this empirical evidence of likely US passivity weight might have been given to Khrushchev's oft-voiced conviction that Soviet power being what it is, US leaders would not dare to use force to prevent or undo any particular communist move that did not involve a direct use of force by one of the socialist countries.

b. Strong motivation must also be allowed:

i. The Soviets may have aimed at offsetting the damage done in recent months to their military power image as against the US and hence to get themselves in a better position to press the US to reach settlement on Soviet terms of various problems -- of which Berlin might be the first but hardly the last. In connection with this possibility:

-- The Soviet line since 1957 has been that the US must accept as a fact of life a shift in the world power balance in favor of the USSR. As long as "the missile gap", etc., was accepted by the US, Moscow apparently believed it could increasingly capitalize on this line in crisis confrontations with the US. But the trend in the US from the summer of 1961 in the way of both an accelerated build-up

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build-up of our own military capability and a downgrading of Soviet strength in comparison with our own has knocked the ground from under Soviet calculations. The Soviets have consequently needed quickly to redress the balance and at the same time to convince the US that it had been redressed, or more than redressed. Otherwise Moscow would be at a grave, and perhaps growing, disadvantage in its continuing struggle against the US.

-- There has been evidence of a general effort of the Soviets both to build up their actual military capability and to improve their power image since last fall: renewal of testing; a succession of decisions indicating an increased resource allocations to the military despite admitted heavy costs to other pressing programs (i.e., no increase in investments in agriculture; food price rises; curtailment of housing construction; etc.); a spectacular revival of intense activity in space over the past several months; the second round of testing; and the newly announced series of rocket tests in the Pacific.

-- Build-up of a Soviet medium and intermediate ballistic capability in Cuba, and medium range bombers, would fit into such a forced draft Soviet effort. Either one of two considerations may have been governing; (a) Moscow may have estimated that too much time would be required to enable it to mount enough ICBM strength to intimidate the US (perhaps even to deter the US) and hence it

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faced urgent need to work out some means of putting the US under the same sort of direct threat of intermediate range missiles that now hangs over Western Europe, and as early and cheaply as possible. (It should be noted that what has reportedly gone into Cuba consists of items that the USSR has in great quantity. It should also be noted that the military importance that Moscow would have attached to the Cuban bases must be judged on the basis of what they expected to get if they got away with the operation, not what they have so far gotten. A parallel automatically suggests itself between the Soviet effort in Cuba and the considerations that led to the US forced draft Polaris program.) Or (b) the Cuban capability may be intended as only one step in a series that Moscow calculates will weaken confidence of the US and especially of others in US military superiority. (If this last should be correct we should look for what Moscow might expect to be a surprise in connection with further nuclear tests, or, especially, in connection with the forthcoming Pacific missile shots. We should also be alert to an early space spectacular.)

-- It is important to recall that beginning in the spring a relative lull appeared to set in in Moscow's prosecution of its foreign policy objective. While this may have been due to indecision, the possibility was noted at the time that Moscow might

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might be marking time pending improvement in its military capability and posture. Because of lead factors, the Soviet decision to establish offensive bases in Cuba would have had to be made at about that time (or at least no later.)

ii. The possibility has to be allowed that the Soviets had in mind something more than simply improving their over-all military posture as against the US.

-- It cannot be entirely ruled out that the Cuban operation is part of a general plan to achieve a military position that would enable the Soviets to engage with maximum chance of success in a final military showdown with the US. The Cuban build-up would obviously be of great value in the case since it would give the Soviets at relatively small direct cost an important added capability against the US. (No concrete or inferential evidence exists that this is actually the Soviet intention. It should be accepted as a speculative possibility, however, because we cannot now, any more than in the past, dismiss out of hand a Soviet resort to force in its contest with us, given either an estimate of an assumed decisive military advantage over us or an estimate that the contest was otherwise going hopelessly and permanently against them.)

-- Another possibility that has to be allowed as a general caveat is that the Soviets have in mind heating up the cold war and has chosen

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has chosen Cuba as a point of departure. The US would be expected to react to Cuba in such a way as to give the Soviets an opening to make a serious move or demand in regard to Berlin, or even Turkey, Iran, or some other area where the US has a foreign base; or the US might be expected to so concentrate its attention on Cuba that it would prove unable to react effectively to some other crisis. This possibility like the foregoing, would require a Soviet readiness to take risks to the point of extreme brinkmanship. (We have no evidence that the Soviets are prepared to take such risks; we again should allow the possibility, however, because it represents a danger that has to be considered inherent in the Soviet campaign against us.)

iii. Aside from direct military and related political considerations, or more probably as a typically Soviet "alternative objective" designed to get something else of value if the prime objective fails, Moscow may have had in mind using the Cuban base development as a pawn in the cold war, exploiting its nuisance value if nothing else. They might expect our reaction to get us into hopeless messes with our allies. They might also expect to capitalize on the Cuban base either through trading them off in a "deal" with the US re Berlin, or to use them to get us to give up some of our own bases, or to secure important concessions on our part re nuclear capability for the West Germans and general

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nuclear proliferation, or even location of nuclear weapons outside national territories; or they might expect it to have a sobering effect on us in connection with our over-all stance on negotiations, including the firmness of our stand on Berlin (even if we showed no interest in a straight "deal" on Berlin.)

2. Although the US has reacted strongly, it does not follow that the Soviets will simply beat a retreat in the face of the action the US has so far taken. This is all the more true since they appear to have strong motives for seeing the business through if they possibly can.

a. If other maneuvers do not work, the Soviets will almost certainly want at some stage to test how far the US is prepared to go. Initially the USSR may ostentatiously avoid a test in "the interest of peace" and to "give reason a chance to prevail". But if the US in spite of indirect pressures perseveres in its apparent firmness, the Soviets will probably want to see just how solid that firmness is. Conceivably, Moscow is, or will become, as much impressed by what we are not doing as by what we are doing. Being old hands at talking a better fight than they intend to make, they will allow a possibility of sheer bluff, or at least of a weakening will if hard choices are concretely presented.

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b. Even after ascertaining the US means business,
(e.g., the US uses whatever force necessary to make the
blockade effective), the Soviets can hardly be expected to
meet our demand that the bases be liquidated. It can be
assumed that they will want to keep what they have (unless we
are willing to pay a high price in exchange. Unless -- contrary
to our estimates -- they are ready for general war in any case,
they probably will be unwilling to go to war to prevent us from
liquidating their bases, or to punish us through a resort to war
after the fact. But they will have no reason to relieve us of the
burden of getting rid of them. They may well reason that we
simply will not be able to bring ourselves to this extreme
(a line of thought our past policies might encourage), or that
if we do go all the way we would have to pay a heavy price in
our relationships with the Latins and the neutrals generally.

c. The soundest calculation seems to be that both before
and after the Soviets have tested our intent and found it serious,
and assuming that in the testing process incidents do not occur
that would force them in deeper than they would like to go, the
Soviets will seek first to blunt the edge and then to smother
over a protracted period our resolve re the bases, holding on
meanwhile to what they already have. To this end they would see
as useful instruments many time-tested devices and tactics:

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long and deceptive debate in the UN, rely upon world-wide concern that war be avoided "at any cost," calls for a summit meeting (by themselves or by others) and other forms of negotiations and utilization of these if they occur to confuse and get around the central issue; organization of "Hands off Cuba" movements; exploitation of incidents; and all against the background of studied Soviet innocence. They will reason time is on their side; that the will of the Latins and of our European allies can be undermined; that ultimately our own resolve will be lost; that every month that passes with the bases intact will result in increased acceptance of them as a fact of life.

3. From the standpoint of US policy stress should be placed on the key fact that the dramatic suddenness and decisiveness of the President's action have created a new image within the world of an aroused US Government. Out of this vigorous action there has arisen a remarkable degree of support of the US position among the non-Communist nations, as evidenced by the nearly unanimous pro-US vote in the OAS, and indications of a probable initial majority support within the General Assembly of the United Nations. This degree of support is, however, likely to become a wasting asset in the event of a protracted blockade which does not achieve the result of removal of the presently

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implaced missiles. Our experience in the Korean War indicates that the support of our allies is likely to become increasingly restive and, furthermore, that internal political support within the US will tend to erode with the passage of time and failure to accomplish minimum objectives to which the President is publicly committed.

The Soviets may be counted upon in their counteractions to seek to exacerbate the foregoing potential weakness of democratic countries in alliance. Furthermore, the mere passage of time will facilitate the resumption of political initiative by the Soviets whereas early follow-up action by the US to liquidate the Cuban missiles will tend to keep the Soviets off balance.

4. The conclusion is almost inescapable, therefore, that US interests will be seriously jeopardized if the US does not follow up a refusal by the USSR to liquidate the bases by forcefully liquidating them ourselves.

a. The chances of escalating incidents will increase in ratio to the length of time a tight blockade is effectively enforced.

b. Time may indeed work in favor of the Soviets as envisaged above. (We believe it almost certainly would).

c. The Soviet missiles are a threat to a sizeable portion of the US strategic forces, which would receive little warning of a missile attack. The US retaliatory force, on which our allies

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allies depend, would be degraded according to the damage sustained. Knowledge of this potential operational loss would adversely affect the validity of the allied nuclear deterrent. In turn, the will of our allies to resist Soviet aggression could be reduced.

d. Political considerations are equally compelling. Indefinite retention of the bases would necessarily have an adverse impact on the struggle between anti-communist and pro-communist elements in a number of Latin American countries and thus seriously impair our whole program there. It would shake general confidence in US firmness in other crisis areas of the world. Moreover, protracted uncertainty in regard to ultimate US intentions, including uncertainty in connection with negotiations, could have costly political consequences. If the idea should spread, justifiably or unjustifiably, that the US was considering a Cuba-for-Turkey deal, or a grand mutual withdrawal around the globe, growing doubts would be raised about the dependability of US commitments. If negotiations should actually occur in the context of such possibilities, doubts would strengthen, find open expression, and thereafter multiply. The Soviets would thus have achieved a signal success. And they would have done this without having to agree to give up the Cuban bases. We would still have the problem of force-fully effecting

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fully effecting this end, and under greatly worsened circumstances,
if it were ever to be accomplished: ...

e. While risks would certainly exist in case of our forcefully liquidating the capability, it seems likely now, as it has seemed likely in the past, that the Soviets will not get themselves involved in a war over Cuba, or over any other particular issue, that they are not ready for general reasons to undertake. Hence if it is to be a matter of war, we can expect to face that hard fact of life over some other issue if Cuba does not produce the result.

f. At this stage in the East-West struggle it is vital that the Soviets not be allowed a success of the magnitude that an effective base on Cuba would represent. The Soviet decision to establish the base, involving the risks that it clearly does, suggests more an act of boldness to secure significant gain. If Moscow gets away with it, the result will doubtless be a definite reduction in pressures operating on it, both internally (e.g., the arms race) and internationally. It would at the same time increase our own defense problems and adversely affect our prestige. It would, in other words, constitute a ridiculously cheap but highly important tour de force on Moscow's part. Here it should be stressed that the Cuban development is not parallel to what we have done in Turkey,

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Western Europe or elsewhere; but to what would be represented
by our establishing a base in Finland or even Hungary.

g. As Soviet success in their Cuban venture would give the Soviets a big power and psychological boost, its failure might prove of great importance to our efforts to get the Soviet problem firmly under control. If, as can well be argued, this is a watershed period for the USSR -- a time of great decision re whether to continue or backtrack in pursuit of cold war objectives, slamming this particular door might prove decisive. This ought to be kept uppermost in mind when considering courses of action. The US stance should surely and finally be that the base is not permissible or negotiable.

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Bernheim G/PM

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October 24, 1962

TO: S/P - Mr. Walt W. Rostow

FROM: S/P - Mose Harvey
G/PM - Raymond L. Garthoff

SUBJECT: Preliminary Reflections on the Cuban Missile Base Problem

1. The decision to establish nuclear missile bases in Cuba must be considered one of the boldest decisions taken by the Soviet leadership since Korea. Like the Korean decision, it was "out of character," in that it qualitatively broke the pattern of past conduct, among other things almost inviting a US reaction of a type that Moscow previously had attempted to avoid. This suggests that the Soviet decision was born either of a gross miscalculation or an extraordinary compelling motivation, or both.

2. The Soviets have doubtless had a number of motives in establishing missile bases in Cuba. They have probably been tempted by the first opportunity to establish a counterpart to American bases encircling the Soviet Union. There can be little doubt that they have recognized that such an action is provocative to Washington, though they may have underestimated the compulsion to react vigorously.

3. That the Soviets grossly miscalculated the US reaction would seem a very good possibility. Cuba fell into the Soviet lap without particular efforts or costs on Moscow's part. Events moved in a way, however, which came heavily to engage both Soviet resources and prestige. At the same time, the Castro regime showed itself pliable to the Soviet will and US demonstrated a clear unwillingness to get itself directly involved in a move to get rid of the regime. The USSR and the East Germans were able to move into Cuba in a way and to an extent that might well have suggested almost no limit to possibilities. Thus the USSR largely took over the economy, the administrative structure, and the military establishment. With the Cubans having welcomed, and the US having tolerated, Soviet military advisers and probably some operational personnel, guns and tanks, up-to-date Soviet combat aircraft, and surface-to-air and later coastal surface-to-surface missiles, Moscow may have reasoned that it could take the next logical step and safely make Cuba into an offensive base that would give it a telling military

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presence at a strategic point in the western hemisphere. Some weight might also have been given to Khrushchev's oft voiced conviction that Soviet power being what it is, US leaders would not dare to use force to undo any particular communist move that did not involve a direct use of force by one of the socialist countries.

4. The Soviet leaders probably calculate that the new period of tension (which, incidentally, they had sought in advance to moderate by their relatively quiescent stand of late on Berlin, Laos, and the like) can be exploited to their advantage. While there are several ways in which the United States could have reacted, and may still react, each would offer certain opportunities for Soviet maneuver.

5. From a period of exuberant confidence following the first Soviet sputnik and first ICBM test in late 1957, the Soviets have thrice marched up the hill on Berlin and down again. From a period of publicly anticipated and acknowledged Soviet superiority in overall military power in 1960, the military balance has by late 1961 and since swung more and more against them, and above all this is publicly accepted. It may appear in Moscow that missile bases in Cuba represent both the first, and probably the last, opportunity to place a lever under the US positions of strength on the Eurasian periphery.

6. The Soviet line since 1957 has been that the US must accept as a fact of life a shift in the world power balance in favor of the USSR. As long as the missile gap, etc., was accepted by the US, Moscow was apparently satisfied that it could increasingly capitalize on this line in crisis confrontations with the US. But the trend in the US from the summer of 1961 in the way of both an accelerated build-up of our own military capability and a downgrading of Soviet strength in comparison with our own has knocked the ground from under Soviet calculations. The Soviets have consequently needed quickly to redress the balance and at the same time to convince the US that it had been redressed, or more than redressed, otherwise Moscow could have only decreasing hope of holding up in a continuing struggle against the US. (The US and not they would be operating from a growing position of strength.)

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7. The Soviets may thus have been tempted by a chance to gain a position which, apart from its political gains, also would put them in a better position to press the US to reach settlement of various problems--of which Berlin would be the most important but hardly the last--on Soviet terms.

8. There has been evidence of intensified Soviet military effort at least since mid-1961: renewal of testing; suspension of demobilization; a succession of decisions indicating increased resource allocations to the military despite admitted heavy costs to other pressing programs and the newly announced series of rocket tests in the Pacific. Build-up of a Soviet medium and intermediate ballistic capability in Cuba would fit into such a Soviet effort.

9. It is possible that the Soviets have in mind heating up the cold war in general, and have chosen Cuba as a point of departure. The US would be expected to react to Cuba in such a way as to give the Soviets an opening to make a serious move or demand in regard to Berlin, or even Turkey, Iran, or some other area where the US has a foreign base. The US might even be expected to concentrate its attention on Cuba to such an extent that it would not react effectively to some other crisis. This possibility, like the foregoing, would require a Soviet readiness to take risks to the point of extreme brinkmanship.

10. At the extreme, the United States might militarily neutralize Cuba, at a cost to the American posture of peace, but also at the price of impairing the image of the USSR as a global power. Since the United States has chosen to act in the first instance resolutely, but not drastically, both sides will have the opportunity of assessing world reactions to the limited measures undertaken.

11. Moscow may have had in mind using the Cuban base development as a pawns in the cold war, exploiting its misance value if nothing else. Specifically, the Soviets might expect to capitalize on the Cuban base either through trading it off in a "deal" with the US re Berlin or some of our other bases, or to secure a commitment on our part to oppose a nuclear capability for the West Germans; or they might expect it to have a sobering effect on us in connection with our over-all stance on negotiations.

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12. The chief Soviet "strategic" assets are: an inter-continental capability which works to restrain the United States from sharp escalation; a powerful nuclear missile force poised against Western Europe, and especially on the access routes to Berlin; a highly vulnerable situation in Laos; and now, the missile bases in Cuba. "Tactically" the Soviets have the advantages of: ability to match a selective blockade of Cuba by a comparable selective "filter" on Allied weapons allowed to go to Berlin; doubtless some sympathy for the view that "defensive" long-range missiles in Cuba are not essentially different from defensive long-range missiles in Turkey; the ability to trade off their Cuban bases for some inroads into the US overseas base system; and the "opportunity" to make the United States fire the first shot if they wish to precipitate an incident in the blockade.

13. The chief weaknesses in the Soviet position are: a basic military inferiority in the event of general war, compounded by Western alert and possible Western presumption in some cases; ineffective sea power either to challenge the American naval blockade, or to institute strictly reciprocal measures; and the inability to interpose their own power between that of the United States and Cuba at any acceptable risk.

14. Although the Soviets may have miscalculated US reaction, it does not follow that they will simply beat a retreat in the face of the action the US has so far taken. This is all the more true since they have strong motives for seeing the business through if they can. They will almost certainly want to test how far we are prepared to go. It is conceivable Moscow will be as much impressed by what we are not doing as by what we are doing. Being old hands at talking a better fight than they intend to make, they will almost certainly see a strong possibility of sheer bluff, or at least of a weakening will if hard choices are concretely presented.

15. Even after ascertaining that the US means business (e.g., the US uses whatever force is necessary to make the blockade effective), the Soviets can hardly be expected to meet our demand that the bases be liquidated. It can be assumed that they will want to keep what they have (unless we are willing to pay a high price in exchange for them). They very probably will be unwilling to go to war to prevent us from

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liquidating them, or to punish us after the fact. But they will have no reason to relieve us of the burden of getting rid of them. They may well reason that we simply will not be able to bring ourselves to this extreme (a line of thought our past policies might encourage), or that if we do go all the way we would have to pay a heavy price in our relationships with the Latins and the neutrals generally.

16. Once the Soviets have tested our intent, and assuming that in the testing process incidents do not occur that would force them in deeper than they would like to go, the Soviets will probably favor dragging the issue out over a protracted period in which they will work over our resolve on the bases, meanwhile holding on to what they already have. They would use time-tested tactics: acrimonious debate in the UN, calls for negotiations, organization of "hands off Cuba" movements, exploitation of incidents. They will reason that time is on their side; that the will of the Latins and of our European allies can be undermined; that ultimately our own resolve will be lost; that every week and month that every week and month that passes with the bases intact will result in increased acceptance of them as a fact of life.

17. The conclusion is almost inescapable that US interests will be seriously jeopardized if the US does not follow up a refusal by the USSR to liquidate the bases by forcefully liquidating them ourselves.

18. The chances of escalating incidents will increase over time as a tight blockade is effectively enforced. Time may indeed work in favor of the Soviets as envisaged above. It is important from the strictly military standpoint and from a politico-military standpoint, that the bases be liquidated as early as possible. We should be gravely concerned not to allow the Soviets to leap-frog at such slight cost the disadvantage deriving from the lag in their ~~own~~ capability, to give them an added military advantage if they intend either an over-all military confrontation or to heat up the cold war, or to concede them more or less gratuitously something which they did not previously have with which to drive hard bargains with us.

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19. While risks would certainly exist in case of our forcefully liquidating the capability, it seems likely now, as it has seemed likely in the past, that the Soviets will not get themselves involved in a war over Cuba, or over any other particular issue, that they are not ready for general reasons to undertake.

20. Beyond this, at this stage in the East-West struggle it is vital that the Soviets not be allowed a success of the magnitude that an effective base on Cuba would represent. The Soviet decision to establish the base, involving the risks that it clearly does, suggests more an act of desperation than anything else. If Moscow gets away with it, the result will doubtless be a definite reduction in pressures operating on it. It would at the same time adversely affect our political prestige and even our military posture. It would, in other words, constitute a ridiculously cheap but highly important tour de force on Moscow's part. Here it should be stressed that the Cuban development is not parallel to what we have done in Turkey, Western Europe or elsewhere, but to what would be represented by our establishing a base in Finland or even Hungary.

21. As Soviet success in their Cuban venture would give the Soviets a big boost, its failure might prove of great importance to our efforts to get the Soviet problem under control. If, as can well be argued, this is a watershed for the USSR—a time of great decision whether to continue or to backtrack in vigor of pursuit of cold war objectives, slamming this particular door might prove decisive. This, we think, is what the United States ought to keep uppermost in mind when we consider courses of action.

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✓ *Moss Harvey draft*
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The Cuban Base Problem in Perspective
(Preliminary Thoughts)

1. The Soviet decision to establish nuclear strike bases in Cuba must be considered one of the boldest taken by the Soviet leadership since Korea. And like the Korean decision it was an "out of character" decision in that it qualitatively broke the pattern of past conduct, among other things inviting a US reaction of a type that Moscow previously had attempted to avoid. This suggests that the Soviet decision was born either of a gross miscalculation or an extraordinary compelling motivation, or both.

a. That the Soviets grossly miscalculated the US reaction would seem a very good possibility. Cuba fell into the Soviet lap without particular efforts or costs on Moscow's part. Events moved in a way, however, which came heavily to engage both Soviet resources and prestige. At the same time, the Castro regime showed itself pliable to the Soviet will and US demonstrated a clear unwillingness to get itself directly involved in a move to get rid of the regime. The USSR and the Satellites were able to move into Cuba in a way and to an extent that might well have suggested almost no limit to possibilities. Thus the Bloc largely took over the economy, the administrative structure, and the military establishment. With the Cubans having welcomed, and the US having tolerated, Soviet military advisers and probably some operational personnel, Soviet tanks, and up-to-date Soviet combat aircraft, Moscow may have reasoned that it could take the next logical step and safely make Cuba into an offensive base that would give it a concrete and telling military presence at a strategic point in the western hemisphere. As an

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adjunct to this empirical evidence of likely US passivity weight might have been given to Khrushchev's oft voiced conviction that Soviet power being what it is, US leaders would not dare to use force to present ~~present~~ or undo any particular communist move that did not involve a direct use of force by one of the socialist countries.

b. Unusually strong motivation must also be allowed:
The Soviets

1./ They may have aimed at gaining a physical military advantage over the US that would put them in a good, or at least better, position to press the US to reach settlement of various problems -- of which Berlin would be the most important but hardly the last -- on Soviet terms. In connection with this possibility:

-- The Soviet line since 1957 has been that the US must accept as a fact of life a shift in the world power balance in favor of the USSR. As long as the missile gap, etc., was accepted by the US, Moscow was apparently satisfied that it could increasingly capitalize on this line in crisis confrontations with the US. But the trend in the US from the summer of 1961 in the way of both an accelerated build-up of our own military capability and a downgrading of Soviet strength in comparison with our own has knocked the ground from under Soviet calculations. The Soviets have consequently needed quickly to redress the balance and at the same time to convince the US that it had been redressed, or more than redressed, Otherwise Moscow could have only decreasing hope of holding up in a continuing struggle against the US. (The US and not they would be operating from a growing position of strength.)

-- There has been evidence of a forced draft Soviet military effort at least since last fall: renewal of testing; a succession of decisions indicating an increased resource allocations to the military despite admitted heavy costs to other pressing programs (i.e., no increase in investments in agriculture; food price rises; curtailment of housing construction; etc.); a spectacular revival of intense activity in space over the past several months; the second round of testing; and the newly announced series of rocket tests in the Pacific.

-- Build-up of a Soviet medium and intermediate ballistic capability in Cuba, and medium range bombers, would fit into such a forced draft Soviet effort. Either one of two considerations may have been governing; (a) Moscow may have estimated that too much time would be required to enable it to mount enough ICBM strength to intimidate the US (perhaps even to deter the US) and hence it faced urgent need to work out some means of putting the US under the same sort of direct threat of intermediate range missiles that now hangs over Western Europe, and as early and cheaply as possible. (It should be noted that what has reportedly gone into Cuba consists of items that the USSR has in great quantity,) Or (b) the Cuban capability may be intended as only one step in a series that Moscow calculates will convince the US that an important gap exists between US and Soviet capability. (If this last should be correct we should look for what Moscow might expect to be a surprise in connection with further nuclear tests, or, especially, in connection with the forth-

coming Pacific missile shots. We should also be alert to an early space spectacular.)

-- It is important to recall that beginning in the spring a lull set in in Moscow's prosecution of its foreign policy objective. While this may have been due to indecision, the possibility was noted at the time that Moscow might be marking time pending some sort of important gain in the military sphere.

11. The possibility has to be allowed that the Soviets had in mind something more than simply improving their over-all military posture as against the US.

-- Their objective may have been to achieve a military position that would enable them to engage with maximum chance of success in a final military showdown with the US. The Cuban build-up would obviously be of great value in this case since it would give the Soviets at relatively small direct cost an important added capability against the US. (No concrete or inferential evidence exists that this is actually the Soviet intention. It should be accepted as speculative possibility only because we cannot now, any more than in the past, rule out completely a Soviet resort to force in its contest with us, given either an estimate of a decisive military advantage over us or an estimate that the contest was going hopelessly against them.)

-- Another possibility is that the Soviets have in mind heating up the cold war and has chosen Cuba as a point of departure. The US would be expected to react to Cuba in such a way as to give the Soviets an opening

to make a serious move or demand in regard to Berlin, or even Turkey, Iran, or some other area where the US has a foreign base; or the US might be expected to so concentrate its attention on Cuba that it would prove unable to react effectively to some other crisis. This possibility like the foregoing, would require a Soviet readiness to take risks to the point of extreme brinkmanship. (We have no evidence that the Soviets are prepared to take such risks; we again should allow the possibility only because it presents a danger that we cannot afford to ignore.

iii. Aside from strictly military considerations, or more probably as a typically Soviet "alternative objective", Moscow may have had in mind using the Cuban base development as a pawn in the cold war, exploiting its nuisance value if nothing else. Specifically, the Soviets might expect to capitalize on the Cuban base either through trading it off in a "deal" with the US re Berlin or some of our other bases, or to secure a commitment on our part to oppose a nuclear capability for the West Germans; or they might expect it to have a sobering effect on us in connection with our over-all stance on negotiations.

2. Although the Soviets may have miscalculated US reaction, it does not follow that they will simply beat a retreat in the face of the action the US has so far taken. This is all the more true since they have strong motives for seeing the business through if they possibly can.

a. They will almost certainly want to test how far we are prepared to go. It is conceivable Moscow will be as much impressed by

what we are not doing as by what we are doing. Being old hands at talking a better fight than they intend to make, they will almost certainly see a strong possibility of sheer bluff, or at least of a weakening will if hard choices are concretely presented.

b. Even after ascertaining the US means business, (e.g., the US uses whatever force necessary to make the blockade effective), the Soviets can hardly be expected to meet our demand that the bases be liquidated. It can be assumed that they will want to keep what they have (unless we are willing to pay a high price in exchange for them). They very probably will be unwilling to go to war to prevent us from liquidating them, or to punish us after the fact. But they will have no reason to relieve us of the burden of getting rid of them. They may well reason that we simply will not be able to bring ourselves to this extreme (a line of thought our past policies might encourage), or that if we do go all the way we would have to pay a heavy price in our relationships with the Latins and the neutrals generally.

-- The soundest calculation seems to be that once the Soviets have tested our intent and found it serious, and assuming that in the testing process incidents do not occur that would force them in deeper than they would like to go, the Soviets will smother over a protracted period our resolve ^{would} re the bases, holding on meanwhile to what they already have. To this end they/see as useful instruments many time-tested devices and tactics: long and acrimonious debate in the UN, calls for negotiations, organization

of "Hands off Cuba" movements, exploitation of incidents. They will reason time is on their side; that the will of the Latins and of our European allies can be undermined; that ultimately our own resolve will be lost; that every month that passes with the bases intact will result in increased acceptance of them as a fact of life.

3. The conclusion is almost inescapable that US interests will be seriously jeopardized if the US does not follow up a refusal by the USSR to liquidate the bases by forcefully liquidating them ourselves.

i. The chances of ^{escalating} ~~escalating~~ incidents will increase in ratio to the length of time a tight blockade is effectively enforced.

ii. Time may indeed work in favor of the Soviets as envisaged above.

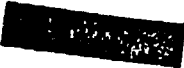
iii. It would seem of vital importance from the strictly military standpoint that the bases be liquidated as early as possible. We should be gravely concerned not to allow the Soviets to leap-frog at such slight cost the disadvantage deriving from the lag in their ICBM capability, to give them an added military advantage if they intend either an over-all military confrontation or to heat up the cold war, or to concede them more or less gratuitously something which they did not previously have with which to drive hard bargains with us.


iv. While risks would certainly exist in case of our forcefully liquidating the capability, it seems likely now, as it has seemed in likely in the past, that the Soviets will not get themselves involved

in a war over Cuba, or over any other particular issue, that they are not ready for general reasons to undertake. Hence if it is to be a matter of war, we can expect to face that hard fact of life over some other issue if Cuba does not produce the result.

v. Beyond this, at this stage in the East-West struggle it is vital that the Soviets not be allowed a success of the magnitude that an effective base on Cuba would represent. The Soviet decision to establish the base, involving the risks that it clearly does, suggests more an act of desperation than anything else. If Moscow gets away with it, the result will doubtless be a definite reduction in pressures operating on it, both internally, (e.g. the arms race) and internationally. It would at the same time increase our own defense problems and adversely affect our prestige. It would, ~~in other words~~ in other words, constitute a ridiculously cheap but highly important tour de force on Moscow's part. Here it should be stressed that the Cuban development is not parallel to what we have done in Turkey, Western Europe or elsewhere, but to what would be represented by our establishing a base in Finland or even Hungary.

vi. As Soviet success in their Cuban venture would give the Soviets a big power and psychological boost, its failure might prove of great importance to our efforts to get the Soviet problem firmly under control. If, as can well be argued, this is a watershed period for the USSR — a time of great decision re whether to continue or backtrack


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in pursuit of cold war objectives, slamming this particular door might prove decisive. This, I think, is what we ought to keep uppermost in mind when we consider courses of action. I would think our stance should surely and finally be that the base is not permissible or negotiable.



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October 24, 1962 R

TO: S/P - Mr. Walt W. Rostow
FROM: S/P - Mose Harvey
G/PM - Raymond L. Carthoff
SUBJECT: Preliminary Reflections on the Cuban Missile Base Problem

1. The decision to establish nuclear missile bases in Cuba must be considered one of the boldest decisions taken by the Soviet leadership since Korea. Like the Korean decision, it was "out of character," in that it qualitatively broke the pattern of past conduct, among other things almost inviting a US reaction of a type that Moscow previously had attempted to avoid. This suggests that the Soviet decision was born either of a gross miscalculation or an extraordinary compelling motivation, or both.
2. The Soviets have doubtless had a number of motives in establishing missile bases in Cuba. They have probably been tempted by the first opportunity to establish a counterpart to American bases encircling the Soviet Union. There can be little doubt that they have recognized that such an action is provocative to Washington, though they may have underestimated the compulsion to react vigorously.
3. That the Soviets grossly miscalculated the US reaction would seem a very good possibility. Cuba fell into the Soviet lap without particular efforts or costs on Moscow's part. Events moved in a way, however, which came heavily to engage both Soviet resources and prestige. At the same time, the Castro regime showed itself pliable to the Soviet will and US demonstrated a clear unwillingness to get itself directly involved in a move to get rid of the regime. The USSR and the East Germans were able to move into Cuba in a way and to an extent that might well have suggested almost no limit to possibilities. Thus the USSR largely took over the economy, the administrative structure, and the military establishment. With the Cubans having welcomed, and the US having tolerated, Soviet military advisers and probably some operational personnel, guns and tanks, up-to-date Soviet combat aircraft, and surface-to-air and later coastal surface-to-surface missiles, Moscow may have reasoned that it could take the next logical step and safely make Cuba into an offensive base that would give it a telling military

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presence at a strategic point in the western hemisphere. Some weight might also have been given to Khrushchev's oft voiced conviction that Soviet power being what it is, US leaders would not dare to use force to undo any particular communist move that did not involve a direct use of force by one of the socialist countries.

4. The Soviet leaders probably calculate that the new period of tension (which, incidentally, they had sought in advance to moderate by their relatively quiescent stand of late on Berlin, Laos, and the like) can be exploited to their advantage. While there are several ways in which the United States could have reacted, and may still react, each would offer certain opportunities for Soviet maneuver.

5. From a period of exuberant confidence following the first Soviet sputnik and first ICBM test in late 1957, the Soviets have thrice marched up the hill on Berlin and down again. From a period of publicly anticipated and acknowledged Soviet superiority in overall military power in 1960, the military balance has by late 1961 and since swung more and more against them, and above all this is publicly accepted. It may appear in Moscow that missile bases in Cuba represent both the first, and probably the last, opportunity to place a lever under the US positions of strength on the Eurasian periphery.

6. The Soviet line since 1957 has been that the US must accept as a fact of life a shift in the world power balance in favor of the USSR. As long as the missile gap, etc., was accepted by the US, Moscow was apparently satisfied that it could increasingly capitalize on this line in crisis confrontations with the US. But the trend in the US from the summer of 1961 in the way of both an accelerated build-up of our own military capability and a downgrading of Soviet strength in comparison with our own has knocked the ground from under Soviet calculations. The Soviets have consequently needed quickly to redress the balance and at the same time to convince the US that it has been redressed, or more than redressed, otherwise Moscow could have only decreasing hope of holding up in a continuing struggle against the US. (The US and not they would be operating from a growing position of strength.)

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7. The Soviets may thus have been tempted by a chance to gain a position which, apart from its political gains, also would put them in a better position to press the US to reach settlement of various problems—of which Berlin would be the most important but hardly the last—on Soviet terms.

8. There has been evidence of intensified Soviet military effort at least since mid-1961: renewal of testing; suspension of demobilization; a succession of decisions indicating increased resource allocations to the military despite admitted heavy costs to other pressing programs and the newly announced series of rocket tests in the Pacific. Build-up of a Soviet medium and intermediate ballistic capability in Cuba would fit into such a Soviet effort.

9. It is possible that the Soviets have in mind heating up the cold war in general, and have chosen Cuba as a point of departure. The US would be expected to react to Cuba in such a way as to give the Soviets an opening to make a serious move or demand in regard to Berlin, or even Turkey, Iran, or some other area where the US has a foreign base. The US might even be expected to concentrate its attention on Cuba to such an extent that it would not react effectively to some other crisis. This possibility, like the foregoing, would require a Soviet readiness to take risks to the point of extreme brinkmanship.

10. At the extreme, the United States might militarily neutralize Cuba, at a cost to the American posture of peace, but also at the price of impairing the image of the USSR as a global power. Since the United States has chosen to act in the first instance resolutely, but not drastically, both sides will have the opportunity of assessing world reactions to the limited measures undertaken.

11. Moscow may have had in mind using the Cuban base development as a pawn in the cold war, exploiting its nuisance value if nothing else. Specifically, the Soviets might expect to capitalize on the Cuban base either through trading it off in a "deal" with the US re Berlin or some of our other bases, or to secure a commitment on our part to oppose a nuclear capability for the West Germans; or they might expect it to have a sobering effect on us in connection with our over-all stance on negotiations.

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12. The chief Soviet "strategic" assets are: an inter-continental capability which works to restrain the United States from sharp escalation; a powerful nuclear missile force poised against Western Europe, and especially on the access routes to Berlin; a highly vulnerable situation in Laos; and now, the missile bases in Cuba. "Tactically" the Soviets have the advantages of: ability to match a selective blockade of Cuba by a comparable selective "filter" on Allied weapons allowed to go to Berlin; doubtless some sympathy for the view that "defensive" long-range missiles in Cuba are not essentially different from defensive long-range missiles in Turkey; the ability to trade off their Cuban bases for some inroads into the US overseas base system; and the "opportunity" to make the United States fire the first shot if they wish to precipitate an incident in the blockade.

13. The chief weaknesses in the Soviet position are: a basic military inferiority in the event of general war, compounded by Western alert and possible Western preemption in some cases; ineffective sea power either to challenge the American naval blockade, or to institute strictly reciprocal measures; and the inability to interpose their own power between that of the United States and Cuba at any acceptable risk.

14. Although the Soviets may have miscalculated US reaction, it does not follow that they will simply beat a retreat in the face of the action the US has so far taken. This is all the more true since they have strong motives for seeing the business through if they can. They will almost certainly want to test how far we are prepared to go. It is conceivable Moscow will be as much impressed by what we are not doing as by what we are doing. Being old hands at talking a better fight than they intend to make, they will almost certainly see a strong possibility of sheer bluff, or at least of a weakening will if hard choices are concretely presented.

15. Even after ascertaining that the US means business (e.g., the US uses whatever force is necessary to make the blockade effective), the Soviets can hardly be expected to meet our demand that the bases be liquidated. It can be assumed that they will want to keep what they have (unless we are willing to pay a high price in exchange for them). They very probably will be unwilling to go to war to prevent us from

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liquidating them, or to punish us after the fact. But they will have no reason to relieve us of the burden of getting rid of them. They may well reason that we simply will not be able to bring ourselves to this extreme (a line of thought our past policies might encourage), or that if we do go all the way we would have to pay a heavy price in our relationships with the Latins and the neutrals generally.

16. Once the Soviets have tested our intent, and assuming that in the testing process incidents do not occur that would force them in deeper than they would like to go, the Soviets will probably favor dragging the issue out over a protracted period in which they will work over our resolve on the bases, meanwhile holding on to what they already have. They would use time-tested tactics: acrimonious debate in the UN, calls for negotiations, organization of "hands off Cuba" movements, exploitation of incidents. They will reason that time is on their side; that the will of the Latins and of our European allies can be undermined; that ultimately our own resolve will be lost; that every week and month that every week and month that passes with the bases intact will result in increased acceptance of them as a fact of life.

17. The conclusion is almost inescapable that US interests will be seriously jeopardized if the US does not follow up a refusal by the USSR to liquidate the bases by forcefully liquidating them ourselves.

18. The chances of escalating incidents will increase over time as a tight blockade is effectively enforced. Time may indeed work in favor of the Soviets as envisaged above. It is important from the strictly military standpoint and from a politico-military standpoint, that the bases be liquidated as early as possible. We should be gravely concerned not to allow the Soviets to leap-frog at such slight cost the disadvantage deriving from the lag in their ICBM capability, to give them an added military advantage if they intend either an over-all military confrontation or to heat up the cold war, or to concede them more or less gratuitously something which they did not previously have with which to drive hard bargains with us.

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19. While risks would certainly exist in case of our forcefully liquidating the capability, it seems likely now, as it has seemed likely in the past, that the Soviets will not get themselves involved in a war over Cuba, or over any other particular issue, that they are not ready for general reasons to undertake.

20. Beyond this, at this stage in the East-West struggle it is vital that the Soviets not be allowed a success of the magnitude that an effective base on Cuba would represent. The Soviet decision to establish the base, involving the risks that it clearly does, suggests more an act of desperation than anything else. If Moscow gets away with it, the result will doubtless be a definite reduction in pressures operating on it. It would at the same time adversely affect our political prestige and even our military posture. It would, in other words, constitute a ridiculously cheap but highly important tour de force on Moscow's part. Here it should be stressed that the Cuban development is not parallel to what we have done in Turkey, Western Europe or elsewhere, but to what would be represented by our establishing a base in Finland or even Hungary.

21. As Soviet success in their Cuban venture would give the Soviets a big boost, its failure might prove of great importance to our efforts to get the Soviet problem under control. If, as can well be argued, this is a watershed for the USSR--a time of great decision whether to continue or to backtrack in vigor of pursuit of cold war objectives, slamming this particular door might prove decisive. This, we think, is what the United States ought to keep uppermost in mind when we consider courses of action.

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